## IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA

Case No.: 0:23-cv-467

Bishop Wayne R. Felton, individually, and The Holy Christian Church International,

Plaintiffs,

v.

De'Mario Jives, individually, and DeMajio Media LLC,

Defendants.

#### **COMPLAINT**

Plaintiffs Bishop Wayne R. Felton, individually, and The Holy Christian Church International, for their Complaint against Defendants De'Mario Jives and DeMajio Media LLC, state and allege as follows:

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Plaintiff Bishop Wayne R. Felton ("Bishop Felton") is the Senior Pastor of *The Holy Christian Church International* ("Church" or "THCCI"), based out of St. Paul, Minnesota. He established the Church 23 years ago—in 2000—which had grown to over four campuses which includes the main campus, serving a racially and economically diverse population of believers in the Twin Cities. Additionally, as Archbishop of the Church, Bishop Felton oversees *The Communion of Holy Christian Churches*, consisting of over 550 churches and ministries around the world—including those located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Liberia, India, and Mexico.

- 2. Unfortunately, as the Church has flourished and grown under Bishop Felton's leadership, he has become a target of a social media influencer by the name of De'Mario Jives ("Jives"), who runs a platform under the name of "Official King Jives" and has 88,000 subscribers on YouTube, 14,400 followers on Facebook, 20,400 followers on TikTok, and 38,000 followers on Instagram. Jives' videos on YouTube range in viewership from a few thousand views per video up to one million views. Jives' focus appears to be attacking Black Christian Churches and Black Church leaders, sowing dissention and disruption within those churches.
- 3. Bishop Felton and the Church fell victim to Defendants' smear campaign beginning in December 2022 when Jives decided to report on an alleged "sex scandal" involving Bishop Felton. Since then, Jives has published numerous lengthy videos and social media posts containing wildly false and defamatory accusations against the Bishop—which include everything from an alleged grooming of women in the Church for sexual affairs, to covertly and hypocritically engaging in homosexuality, to implied pedophilia, to allegations that the Bishop exiled two female members from the Church because they married Muslim men. Of course, Jives knew that none of this is true; it is maliciously designed to impugn the character and reputation of the Bishop, drive people away from the Church, and increase viewership and followers of Jives' platforms.
- 4. Initially, Bishop Felton and the Church chose to ignore Defendants' defamatory campaign—believing it best not to respond to such overt lies and distortion of facts. However, Defendants have been successful in their unlawful scheme to increase Jives' online profile at the expense of tearing down Bishop Felton and the Church.

Thousands of people have watched, shared, and commented on Jives' videos of the Plaintiffs, and members have left the Church in droves as a result. Bishop Felton's personal and professional reputation has been irreparably damaged, and Jives continues to threaten to damage his reputation further. Additionally, Bishop Felton and his wife have received harassing mail and threats from strangers who specifically referenced Jives' videos and his giving them access to the letters online as the source of their angst. The Church has likewise been defamed, suffering severe financial consequences, including losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in vital contributions that allow the Church to fulfill its mission to serve the community and the poor.

5. Jives and his company have been sued by other church leaders in other areas of the country in the past for similar conduct; however, Jives appears to remain undeterred. Therefore, Plaintiffs have no choice but to commence this action to obtain a court order enjoining Defendants' unlawful conduct, and seeking damages for the harm Defendants have inflicted on Bishop Felton and the Church.

#### **PARTIES**

- 6. Plaintiff Bishop Wayne R. Felton is the Senior Pastor of *The Holy Christian Church*, and resides in Saint Paul, Minnesota.
- 7. Plaintiff The Holy Christian Church International is a nonprofit corporation duly organized and existing under the laws of the state of Minnesota. Its principal place of business is located in Saint Paul, Minnesota.
- 8. Defendant De'Mario Jives is an individual who, upon information and belief, resides at 7410 Becky Thatcher Lane, Tampa, FL 33637. Jives operates under the

following names/aliases: De'Mario Q. Jives, King Jives Show, United Kingdom Media/Ministries, and Official King Jives.

9. Defendant DeMajio Media LLC is a limited liability company organized under the laws of the State of Florida. Defendant De'Mario is the sole member of DeMajio Media and therefore DeMajio Media is a citizen of the state of Florida.

### **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

- 10. This Court has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1332 because the amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000 and this is a civil action between citizens of different states.
  - 11. Bishop Felton and THCCI are citizens of the state of Minnesota.
- 12. Jives is a citizen of the state of Florida and DeMajio Media—which is a citizen of the state(s) in which its members are citizens—is a citizen of Florida.
- 13. Therefore, for the purposes of subject matter jurisdiction, there is complete diversity of citizenship between the parties.
- 14. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C § 1391 because "a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred" in this District.
- 15. This Court has personal jurisdiction over Jives because Jives intentionally defamed Bishop Felton and THCCI, an individual and an entity whom Jives knows to be located in the state of Minnesota. Such conduct was expressly aimed at Minnesota and expressly aimed at Minnesota citizens, and was committed with knowledge that damage would result to Bishop Felton and THCCI in Minnesota. Indeed, both Defendants were

intentionally attempting to sow dissention and harm to a Church in Minnesota by engaging Minnesota-based members of THCCI in these defamatory posts.

16. In addition, on information and belief, the Defendants conduct business in Minnesota for and on behalf of Minnesota businesses, including the Minnesota Community and Technical College, several Church of God in Christ Churches in Minnesota, and Minneapolis Government Officials. Moreover, on information and belief, the Defendants advertise their business in Minnesota. Furthermore, Jives has social media accounts that can be accessed by anyone around the world. Through these social media platforms, Jives is targeting the Minnesota THCCI community for the purpose of causing discord and dissention.

#### FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

### A. Bishop Felton and THCCI

- 17. Bishop Felton is an alumnus of Tuskegee University, receiving his BS in Political Science and English. He received his Masters of Divinity at Asbury Theological Seminary of Wilmore, Kentucky, in 1996.
- 18. Prior to founding THCCI, Bishop Felton was a Chaplain Assistant at Tuskegee University from 1988 to 1992. He was a Chaplain-intern at the Federal Bureau of Prisons from 1995 to 1997 and worked as a Staff Chaplain overseeing religious groups in the resident population and performed ministry to residents in the psychiatric ward and facility hospital. He was the football Chaplain at the University of Minnesota from 2008 to 2010.

- 19. The Holy Christian Church International was established as a racially diverse group, whose principal aim was to fulfill the *Great Commission* as per the Scriptures and serve the needs of the poor and indigent in the Twin Cities and globally.
- 20. THCCI was founded in 2000 beginning with six charter members, eventually grew and branched into several campuses and "daughter" churches in Mankato, Rochester, and New Orleans, Louisiana. It served approximately 350 households from their St. Paul headquarters, and sponsors various community outreach events, children's camps, and fellowship conferences in the Twin Cities. The Church also is televised nationally in Minnesota, Iowa, New York, and Virginia.

## B. <u>Jives</u>

- 21. Jives is a social media influencer who has made a career in targeting religious leaders and churches throughout the United States, providing false narratives and making ruinous claims based on hearsay for internet likes and views. Jives claims on his Facebook page that he is a "content creator and a journalist that gets the news and the tea," but consistently makes statements that lack foundation for his claims.
- 22. He operates several social media accounts under the aliases of King Jives Show, De'Mario Q. Jives, United Kingdom Media, United Kingdom Ministries, and Official King Jives. Combined across platforms, he has over 100,000 followers and over twenty-four million views on his content.
- 23. Jives is also a graphic designer and founder of DeMajio Media, LLC, which provides services to clients across the country—including in Minnesota.

24. Jives' personal and business personas are closely intertwined. On his company website, www.demajio.com, Jives shares blog posts with slanderous titles promoting his Facebook lives and YouTube videos with allegations of misconduct against numerous pastors and religious organizations. These repeated postings demonstrate Jives' history of attacking religious leaders to further his popularity and for economic gain.

## C. <u>Jives Defames Bishop Felton and THCCI</u>

- 25. On December 9, 2022, Jives went live on his Facebook page under the name De'Mario Q. Jives, claiming that he had received information relating to allegations of a "sex scandal" against Bishop Felton.
- 26. In the video, Jives claims he received a voicemail on November 23, 2022, regarding allegations against Bishop Felton. He stated that he had "gotten one side, I've got two letters from the other side, and police records and complaints or whatever, I'm going to tell y'all this." This statement is not true because Jives did not receive Bishop Felton's "side" of the story regarding these allegations. In fact, while Jives and Bishop Felton spoke briefly about this matter, Jives deceptively informed Bishop Felton that he would *not* be publishing anything about this matter on his platforms and that their conversation would be "off the record." Because Jives attended The Holy Christian Church for a season of time—approximately a year (circa 2011-2012), Bishop Felton initially felt comfortable in speaking with Jives since he gave him the courtesy of informing him of the "tip" he received about the matter. At no time in their conversation

did Bishop Felton admit or confess to a sexual affair, contrary to what Jives proclaimed on his platform.

- 27. In the live video, Jives accuses Bishop Felton of sexual misconduct based on a letter he allegedly received—from an anonymous source. Jives republished the letter and then expounded on the unfounded allegations in the letter, going over it line-by-line on video, maliciously adding new allegations that have no support and for which he clearly did no investigation of before publishing.
- 28. Jives thereafter republished the letter from the anonymous source without conducting any independent investigation to determine the veracity or truthfulness of the allegations in the letter. But more importantly, Jives did more than simply republish the letter—which was longwinded but short on allegations of specific sexual misconduct. Rather, Jives used the letter as a springboard to make a host of salacious and unfounded allegations about the Bishop and his family.
- 29. In the live video, Jives states that Bishop Felton's sons also engaged in sexual misconduct. Specifically, Jives states: "Because it's not only him, but it's the sons too." This video has received 3,500 views as of February 2023. These statements are untrue.
- 30. On December 9, 2022, Jives further stated that Bishop Felton engaged in homosexuality. He stated: "Y'all preaching so hard against homosexuality only for y'all to get caught up in homosexuality." Again, this is an untruthful statement. During the same broadcast, Jives falsely alleged that Bishop Felton has a sensual interest in seeing videos of underage sexual activity: "That's why I been trying to tell you right now, y'all

want to talk about some homosexual and pedophile...??? I'm a homosexual and I don't want to see no child, no no child! Hello? I don't want to see no child." In this statement, Jives insinuates to his audience that Bishop Felton was a homosexual and a pedophile, which are completely and utterly false accusations.

- 31. On December 10, 2022, Jives posted another YouTube video under the account *Official King Jives* titled "Certified Details: Minnesota Will Never Be The Same!" In this video, Jives states that members of THCCI were commenting in chat rooms in connection with a prior video he posted, stating that they were "going ham, spewing that rhetoric that your pastor was preaching being hateful, being evil." The video has received over 6,200 views as of February 2023. This statement is false because none of the THCCI members typed any comments in the live chat for that video. However, this statement was made by Jives in order to disrupt the Church's operations and sow dissention among its members.
- 32. On that same day, Jives stated that "y'all slept with that woman's husband," referring to Bishop Felton. This statement is false because Bishop Felton never had a sexual relationship with the woman referenced, nor did *she* ever say he did. This video was watched by at least 6,263 people.
- 33. On December 11, 2022, Jives posted a YouTube video under the account Official King Jives titled "PT2: Certified Details: Bishop Wayne Felton Sr./Minnesota Will Never Be the Same!" stating he spoke to Bishop Felton.
- 34. In the video, Jives claims that Bishop Felton made homophobic remarks towards him and that Bishop Felton was aware that Jives was going to "go live" after the

conversation. He stated: "Bishop knows about all of this and he already knows that I was gonna do this live." This is another untruthful statement because Bishop Felton was unaware Jives was intending to make a video after the conversation. To the contrary, Jives assured Bishop Felton he would *not* be publicizing the conversation, and, to Bishop Felton's surprise, Jives texted him during his live broadcast to inform him of it by saying, "So just an FYI it's public, so imma talk about it ok, I'm just tryna figure out how to talk about this...I'm really lost and tryna make this look good." Subsequently, this video received over 12,000 views across Jive's Facebook profile, United Kingdom Ministries, and the Official King Jives YouTube page.

- 35. Also, on December 11, 2022, Jives stated that "[w]hen [Felton] was at his previous church as a youth Pastor, this same type of act was going on. Hello. Not only was this same type of act going on, but Bishop said that white folks at that church was trying to run him out and they didn't want a black, for a black man in charge." This statement is false because Bishop Felton was never a youth pastor at another church and never made the comments Jives attributes to him. This YouTube video was observed by 7,396 people. Additionally, he falsely stated that Bishop Felton's wife "had to know what was going on" and was an enabler of the alleged activity. This is a false and misleading statement.
- 36. In the days that followed, Jives continued to relentlessly defame Bishop Felton and the Church. On December 15, 2022, Jives posted another video titled: "News Room: Bishop J Drew Sheard \$12 Million, Bishop Wayne Felton scandal, Jamaal Bryant" on the *Official King Jives* YouTube page, alleging that Bishop Felton kicked two

women out of the church for marrying Muslim men. These statements are untrue because the women referenced in the video were never dismissed from Church membership.

- 37. On December 18, 2022, Jives posted a video on Facebook entitled "De-Mario Q Jives was live with DivaDoll JuDonna." In that video, Jives suggests that Bishop Felton is grooming other women in the congregation for sexual misconduct. Specifically, he states that "there's another Marquita now. I guess she at the church now, she over there with Bishop now. All of a sudden her and two other women are the Prophet's amen." This statement is false because Marquita—a member of THCCI—is not being groomed for sexual misconduct, nor has she ever stated that she is no longer a member of the Church. This video was viewed on Facebook by 5,500 people.
- 38. On December 26, 2022, Jives posted another video, "Tory Lanze Guilty! COGIC Bishop J Drew Sheard, Scandal Bishop Wayne Felton, Michelle and Barack Obama," on the *Official King Jives* pages. He claims that Bishop Felton "was his friend publicly but crucified me at his Church" for being homosexual. Jives accuses other members of THCCI of making homophobic statements as well. This is not true because Bishop Felton has never disparaged Jives nor mentioned his name from the pulpit. The YouTube video received over 7,900 views.
- 39. On January 5, 2023, Jives went live on Facebook and made further untrue statements about Bishop Felton's alleged comments regarding homosexuality. Specifically, Jives stated: "You've got Wayne Felton right now standing up in his Church when he's supposed to be sitting down, standing up in his Church talking about we're bastard people and we're going straight to hell." This statement is untrue because Bishop

Felton never made those statements. This video was viewed on Facebook by at least 2,400 people.

- 40. Even today, Defendants continue to defame Plaintiffs. For example, on Defendants' website—www.demajio.com—Jives features a post entitled, "Sex Adultry IN the Pulpit and office in Minnesota Church, THCCI Bishop Wayne Felton." Once again, even the title of this post is defamatory as it contains statements of "fact" that are untrue.
- 41. The impact of the Defendants' unlawful, public crusade against Bishop Felton and THCCI has been devastating. Bishop Felton's personal and professional reputation has been considerably damaged; he has spent the past several months, attempting to "disprove" allegations that have no basis in fact or reality, and seeking to repair the damage inflicted upon the Church's integrity, his name, and the negative fiscal impact due to members leaving in direct response to his false statements.
- 42. Bishop Felton has been further damaged emotionally, suffering from embarrassment and humiliation due to the widespread viewership of his broadcasts, coupled with his insistence upon making the letters downloadable on several mediums.
- 43. The Church also has been damaged through disruption, confusion, dissention, and the loss of more than 50% of its members, along with the loss of more than 65% of its financial contributions. Indeed, the financial damage has required THCCI to liquidate assets in order to maintain current missional operations.

- 44. Plaintiffs bring this action because, unless the Court orders Defendants to stop their defamatory, malicious, harassing, cyber-bullying conduct, this will only continue and Plaintiffs will be further damaged.
- 45. Plaintiffs seek not only injunctive relief through this action, but also damages for the harm caused by the Defendants.

## **CLAIMS**

## COUNT I DEFAMATION

- 46. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference all other paragraphs in this Complaint and restate and re-allege the same.
- 47. Defendant Jives acted on behalf of himself and on behalf of the other Defendant in making these defamatory statements.
- 48. Defendants have published numerous false and misleading representations, statements, and commentary about Plaintiffs. These include:
  - (a) Falsely stating that Jives had received Bishop Felton's side of the story before initially publishing the alleged sex scandal whereas Jives admitted in communique that Bishop Felton did not divulge his side of the story and that he understood their conversation was off the record.
  - (b) Falsely stating that Bishop Felton's sons engaged in sexual misconduct.
  - (c) Falsely stating that Bishop Felton's wife was knowledgeable of the matter and was an enabler.

- (d) Falsely informing the public that Bishop Felton was hypocritical for preaching against homosexuality and then engaging in the same.
- (e) Falsely stating that members of THCCI were commenting in chat rooms and being "evil" and "hateful."
- (f) Falsely stating that Bishop Felton slept with a woman referred to in the letter who is a Church member.
- (g) Falsely reporting that Bishop Felton was aware that Jives was "going live" with this "story."
- (h) Falsely stating that Bishop Felton engaged in the "same" conduct when he was a Youth Pastor, and using the word "pedophile" in a video about Bishop Felton and the Church.
- (i) Falsely suggesting that Bishop Felton was grooming other women in THCCI for sexual misconduct.
- (j) Falsely claiming that Bishop Felton "was his friend publicly but crucified me at his church" for being homosexual.
- (k) Falsely accusing other members of THCCI of making homophobic statements against him.
- (l) Making false statements about Bishop Felton's sexual orientation and implying that he is a pedophile.
- 49. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the defamatory statements Defendants have made; this is a summary of some of the most damaging and untruthful statements uncovered to date.

- 50. Defendants were aware that these statements were false and made them with malicious intent. Specifically, Jives acted with the intent is to destroy Bishop Felton's reputation due to his position with the Church and due to prior statements that Bishop Felton had made on Jives' show about biblical teachings, with which Jives did not agree. Jives also acted with the intent to damage and disrupt the Church for his own personal pecuniary gain. For these reasons, Jives acted with malice. Jives was willing to publish these knowingly untrue statements because the more inflammatory the "story," the more viewers for Jives—which results in financial gain to him.
- 51. Defendants specifically name Bishop Felton, THCCI, and members of THCCI in their videos, which demonstrates that the matters discussed in these videos are not matters of public concern. Moreover, the false statements relate to an alleged relationship between two adult persons, which is a private matter and was stylized as such where the letters he posted and discussed were specifically addressed to Bishop Felton and his wife only.
- 52. Despite Jives referring to himself on occasion as a journalist, Defendants did not make any effort to verify the statements and to confirm that the substance of the statements were true before blasting them out on numerous social media platforms. And Jives' malicious intent to destroy Bishop Felton's reputation and disrupt the Church due to Jives' personal disagreement with Bishop Felton is not in line with any sort of journalistic professionalism.
- 53. These defamatory statements damaged Bishop Felton personally, professionally, economically, emotionally, and reputationally. The statements lowered his

reputation in the estimation of the community, caused pain, suffering, humiliation and embarrassment for him and his family, and have cost him professional opportunities now and in the future. His name has been disgracefully tarnished by Defendants' conduct.

- 54. The Church has also been damaged reputationally and financially, losing 50% of its members and 65% of its monthly contributions where the majority attribute Jives' videos as the impetus for their decision to leave. Due to the lost financial support, Plaintiff THCCI has had to liquidate assets to support its current operations.
  - 55. The Church has also sustained irreparable reputational damage.
- 56. Defendants' actions were willful and intentional and/or done in reckless disregard of the rights of Plaintiffs.
  - 57. Defendants' unlawful conduct must be enjoined.
- 58. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' conduct, Plaintiffs have suffered damages in excess of \$75,000.

# COUNT II DEFAMATION PER SE

- 59. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference all other paragraphs in this Complaint and restate and re-allege the same.
- 60. Defendant Jives acted on behalf of himself and on behalf of the other Defendant in publishing these defamatory statements.
- 61. Among other things, Defendants made statements directly or indirectly accusing Bishop Felton of engaging serious sexual misconduct.
- 62. Under Minnesota common law, a statement of such sexual misconduct is defamation per se.

- 63. Defendants have made the following statements that accuse or imply that Bishop Felton has engaged in serious sexual misconduct:
  - (a) Jives falsely suggested that Bishop Felton was grooming other women in THCCI for sexual misconduct when he stated: "there's another Marquita now. I guess she at the church now, she over there with Bishop now. All of a sudden her and two other women are the Prophet's amen."
  - (b) Jives also falsely stated that Bishop Felton slept with a woman not his wife, referencing the woman from the letter, when he stated that "y'all slept with that woman's husband."
  - (c) Jives falsely stated that "[w]hen [Felton] was at his previous church as a youth Pastor, this same type of act was going on. Hello. Not only was this same type of act going on, but Bishop said that white folks at that church was trying to run him out and they didn't want a black, for a black man in charge."
  - (d) Jives falsely stated that Bishop Felton was homosexual and a pedophile.
  - (e) Jives further falsely stated that "Y'all preaching so hard against homosexuality only for y'all to get caught up in homosexuality."
- 64. Defendants' statements constitute defamation per se because they accuse or imply that Bishop Felton has engaged in serious sexual misconduct.

- 65. Defendants' statements further constitute defamation per se because they relate to Bishop Felton's profession as a Bishop and disparage his professional conduct as a Bishop.
- 66. Defendants' statements also constitute defamation per se because they disparage THCCI's business.
- 67. Defendants were aware that these statements were false and made them with malicious intent because Jives' purpose in publishing these statements was to hurt Bishop Felton's reputation and disrupt the Church due to his personal disagreement with Bishop Felton.
- 68. These statements were publicly communicated to millions of third parties on public social media platforms including YouTube and Facebook.
- 69. Defendants' actions were willful and intentional and/or done in reckless disregard of the rights of the Plaintiffs.
  - 70. Defendants' actions must be enjoined.
- 71. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' conduct, Plaintiffs have suffered damages in excess of \$75,000.

## **COUNT III**

## **BUSINESS DISPARAGEMENT UNDER MINN. STAT. § 325D.44**

- 72. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference all other paragraphs in this Complaint and restate and re-allege the same.
- 73. Under Minn. Stat. § 325D.44, subd. 1(8), "a person engages in a deceptive trade practice when, in the course of business, vocation, or occupation, the person . . .

disparages the goods, services, or business of another by false or misleading representation of fact."

- 74. Defendants, in the course of their business, have disparaged the business of THCCI by making the above-referenced false and/or misleading representations of fact about what THCCI preaches and the services offered by Bishop Felton and the Church.
- 75. Defendants' false and misleading statements of fact have caused, and will cause, irreparable harm to THCCI and Bishop Felton. Plaintiffs are entitled to injunctive relief under Minn. Stat. § 325D.45, subd. 1, and under principles of common law and equity, prohibiting Defendants from further disparaging their business.
- 76. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' disparaging, false, or misleading representations of fact, THCCI and Bishop Felton have been damaged in an amount that exceeds \$75,000.
- 77. In addition, Plaintiffs are entitled to costs and attorneys' fees under Minn. Stat. § 325D.45, subd. 2.

#### PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs Bishop Wayne R. Felton and The Holy Christian Church International request the following relief:

- 1. Entering judgment against Defendants for actual, direct, and consequential damages, including lost profits, in an amount greater than \$75,000;
- 2. Enjoining Defendants from making disparaging false and/or misleading representations of fact about Bishop Felton and THCCI;

- 3. Ordering Defendants to remove their false and defamatory videos, posts, and statements about Plaintiffs;
- 4. Awarding to Bishop Felton damages for suffered humiliation, anxiety, pain, suffering, and other emotional damages due to Defendants' defamation;
- 5. Awarding Plaintiffs their attorney's fees and costs as allowed by law, including under Minn. Stat. § 325D.45, subd. 2; and
  - 6. Awarding such other and further relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

## **DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL**

Plaintiffs Bishop Wayne R. Felton and The Holy Christian Church International demand a jury trial on all issues triable to a jury.

Dated: February 27, 2023 s/Pamela Abbate-Dattilo

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